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## “OF ALL MEN THE MOST MISERABLE”

So Paul described Christians who had no risen Christ. To have believed and lost belief was worse than never to have believed at all. They had not only been disappointed—they had proclaimed a false religion.

And the sin of that false religion was optimism! Because of the gospel men had believed in something which had given them joy, and had brought joy to others; and that belief had been a deception.

Of course, Paul did not believe that the good news was false. He was sure he had not believed cunningly devised fables. Back of his enthusiasm there was the thrust of a great conviction.



The misery of which Paul speaks was not confined to the first century. There is many a preacher of the gospel whose confidence in his message has been honeycombed by unwarranted doubt.

Sometimes these doubts are the outgrowth of reaction from impossible beliefs. Any man acquainted with the hyperorthodox knows how many men drop from the ministry because they have claimed to believe more than they had any right to believe. Along with the gospel they have carried over the figures of speech, the very intellectual clothing, in which the gospel was expressed. And when they have come to see that such intellectual habiliment really does not belong to the heart of the gospel they have thought that the gospel itself was lost.

Overtrained in dogma, they are incapable of meeting the pressure of the religious need of a modern world.



There are other men who have lost their old-time convictions for quite other reasons. They think themselves liberal because they

believe less than they once believed. Overemphasizing investigation, they have come to question everything.

For a few months or years, it may be, they have enjoyed the enthusiasm of men liberated from unnecessary beliefs, only at last to find themselves dispossessed of their spiritual ambitions.

Thereupon their spiritual engine has "gone dead."

In caring for the headlight they have forgotten the fire-box.



Both of these classes of men are to be profoundly pitied, not alone because of their own spiritual bankruptcy, but because their bankruptcy was unnecessary. Our Christian religion with its faith in a God of Law who is also a God of Love; in a Jesus who is his historical revelation; in an immortality which he has brought to light; in the gospel of salvation which he preached and which he demonstrated is not something to be cast to one side with impunity. It is too vital for life not to avenge its disappearance.

Intellectual sophistication is no substitute for spiritual certainty. There is an everlasting Yea, but there is no everlasting Perhaps.

To preach the gospel of Jesus with enthusiasm does not require one to train oneself in credulity or to qualify one's intellectual honesty by obscurantism. Today, even more than in Paul's day, we know that the gospel of the resurrection has a place in the new world which science is revealing to us.

The preacher with no message beyond the call to investigation will be the shepherd of skeptics. A preacher of convictions, even though those convictions may be too large to be cast in terms of the past, too precious to be subjected to the discipline of authority, possesses a contagious faith which will make faith epidemic among those to whom he ministers.

The progress of the church is not marked by abandoned convictions, but by the growth of faith.

The only miserable preacher of the gospel is the man caught by an intellectual panic, as unnecessary as it is foolish.